Bert Jacobs

An Early Syriac Response to the Charge of *Taḥrīf* in George of Bʿeltan's *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*

Abstract: This contribution studies a hitherto unidentified Syriac response to the Muslim charge of biblical falsification (*taḥrīf*), found in chapter 49 of the introduction to the *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* by the West Syriac Patriarch George of Bʿeltan (758–89/90). Besides its early date and comprehensiveness, two elements render this brief text unique in Syriac literature. First, it contains among the earliest quotations of the Qur'ān in Syriac, if not the very first. Second, it provides the earliest version of the so-called "True Religion Apology," a discourse that soon thereafter becomes very popular in Arabic Christian apologetic texts but is much less common in Syriac. Besides introducing this original response to *taḥrīf*, this contribution provides an edition of the chapter with English translation.

1 Introduction

It has become commonplace in recent scholarship to point out that Syriac Christians were among the first to interact with Muslims.[1] It is, however, not the case that Syriac Christians and Muslims were engaged in debating intricate theological issues immediately after the conquests. Around the turn of the eighth century, the ruling caliphs in Damascus (and later Baghdad) more assertively began to promote the new religious profile of their conquered territories. It was only then that Islam,

1 A major guide to the earliest Syriac literature on Islam is Michael P. Penn, *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World* (Pennsylvania, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Michael P. Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015).

Acknowledgements: The research for this contribution was carried out in the context of my FNRS–F.R.S. postdoctoral project: *Christian Exegesis of the Qur'ān in the Medieval Islamicate World*, hosted at Université catholique de Louvain. This contribution has profited from discussions with and comments from Herman Teule, Mehdi Azaiez, and Kelli Gibson. I also thank Herman Teule, Philip Forness, and Gabriel Rabo for helpful suggestions and corrections to my edition and translation. All remaining shortcomings are my own.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111140766-002

and particularly Christian apostasy to Islam, became serious pastoral and theological concerns to church leaders. The emergence of a distinct genre of apologetic literature aimed at answering Muslim criticisms of Christianity and strengthening Christians in their faith should be seen in the light of these disruptive socio-religious circumstances.[2]

While the earliest examples of this literature were written in Syriac and Greek, apologetics directed at Islam were soon conducted predominantly in Arabic. By the ninth century, Christian intellectuals from the three major Syriac churches turned to the official language of the Caliphate to compose such apologies.[3] As Syriac gradually became a minority language, at least in the central areas of the Abbasid Caliphate, it was used less frequently for writing apologetic treatises in response to Islam. However, a new series of Syriac responses to Islam emerged during the period of cultural and literary revival called the "Syriac Renaissance" (ca. 1026–1318).[4] As a testimony to the dominance of Arabic in early Christian-Muslim controversy, only about eight major Syriac apologetic texts in response to Islam are attested before the eleventh century. Since these works have all been closely examined, most recently and comprehensively by Joachim Jakob,[5] the following basic table should suffice here:

---

2 The standard survey of the principal Syriac materials is Sidney H. Griffith, "Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts: From Patriarch John (d. 648) to Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286)," in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, ed. Bernard Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992), 251–73. See also Barbara Roggema, "Pour une lecture des dialogues islamo-chrétiens en syriaque à la lumière des controverses internes à l'islam," in *Les controverses religieuses en syriaque*, ed. Flavia Ruani, Études syriaques 13 (Paris: Geuthner, 2016), 261–93.

3 For orientation, see Ayman S. Ibrahim, ed., *Medieval Encounters: Arabic-Speaking Christians and Islam*, Gorgias Handbooks 55 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2022).

4 Herman Teule, "The Syriac Renaissance," in *The Syriac Renaissance*, ed. Herman Teule, Carmen Tauwinkl, Bas ter Haar Romeny and Jan van Ginkel, Eastern Christian Studies 9 (Leuven–Paris–Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2010), 1–30, esp. 25–28. More recently, see Herman Teule, "Jacob bar Shakkō," *CMR*, vol. 4, 240–44; Bert Jacobs, "Unveiling Christ in the Islamicate World: Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Prophetology as a Model for Christian Apologetics in Gregory Bar ʿEbrōyō's Treatise on the Incarnation," *IHIW* 6, no. 1–2 (2018): 187–216; Bert Jacobs, "Syriac Testimonies Against the Muslims: The Qur'anic Quotations in Dionysius bar Ṣalībī's *Disputation against the Arabs*" (PhD Thesis, Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2021); and Salam Rassi, *Christian Thought in the Medieval Islamicate World: ʿAbdīshōʿ of Nisibis and the Apologetic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

5 Joachim Jakob, *Syrisches Christentum und früher Islam: Theologische Reaktionen in syrisch-sprachigen Texten vom 7. bis 9. Jahrhundert*, Innsbrucker Theologische Studien 95 (Innsbruck–Wien: Tyrolia–Verlag, 2021).

Author	Denomination	(Modern) Title	Dating
Anonymous	West Syriac	*Dialogue of Patriarch John and the Emir*	late 7th or early 8th century
Anonymous	East Syriac	*Disputation of a Monk of Bēt Ḥālē and an Arab Notable*	late 8th or early 9th century
Timothy I (d. 823)	East Syriac	*Disputation with the Caliph al-Mahdī* (Letter 59), *Disputation with a Philosopher at the Caliph's Court* (Letter 40)	circa 782/3
Theodore bar Kōnī (8th century)	East Syriac	*Scholion*, *Memrā* X: Dialogue between a teacher, representing the Christians, and a student, representing the "pagans" (*ḥanpē*)	circa 792/3
Anonymous	East/West Syriac	*Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā*	early 9th century
Nonnus of Nisibis (d. 870)	West Syriac	*Apologetic Treatise*	mid/late 9th century
Moses bar Kephā (d. 903)	West Syriac	*On Divine Providence*, *Mimrō* II, chapter 6: "Against the *Mhaggrōyē*, who also take away freedom, and say that good or evil is prescribed for us by God"	late 9th century

A hitherto unidentified text from the second half of the eighth century should be added to this familiar list of early Syriac apologetic texts. This brings us to our main author, George of Bʿeltan, who served as the West Syriac Patriarch from 758 until his death in 789/90.[6] George did not write a separate work on Islam. Rather, much

6 Since George's chapter against Islam was later re-used in chapter 40 of Moses bar Kephā's introduction to his *Commentary of the Gospels* (London, British Library, MS Add 17274, fol. 33vb), more than one text should be added to the list. For an edition of the remaining fragment of Bar Kephā's chapter, see the annex of Bert Jacobs, "Appraising Bar Ṣalībī's Knowledge of Islam: Insights from a Neglected Response to the Charge of Biblical Falsification," in *Dionysius bar Ṣalībī: Guardian of the Syriac Orthodox Tradition*, ed. Bert Jacobs, Herman Teule, and Joseph Verheyden, Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity. Leiden–Boston: Brill, forthcoming. Kelli Gibson identified yet another early Syriac response to Islam in Mardin, Church of the Forty Martyrs, MS 356 (9th–10th century), fols. 125v–126v. This finding was presented during the *13th Symposium Syriacum* in Paris (July 4–7, 2022). For a brief note "On the religion of the *Ṭayyāyē*" dating to sometime between the mid-9th and 13th centuries, see Yonathan Moss, "'A Religion Assembled from Many Religions:' A Syncretizing Characterization of Islam attributed to Cyril of Alexandria," *Henoch* 39 (2017): 287–305. Another text that requires mention here has been by analyzed by Gerrit J. Reinink, "The 'Book of Nature'

like Theodore bar Kōnī's *Scholion*, he incorporated his response to Islam in a larger exegetical work. This work is his *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, an unpublished text, preserved in a single, incomplete manuscript at the Vatican Library (MS Syriac 154). More specifically, George's response is found in chapter 49 of the first part of the theological introduction prefaced to his *Commentary*. Different from most Syriac apologists, George does not provide a general apology covering all the major topics of Christian-Muslim controversy. George addresses only one central topic, similar to Moses bar Kephā's chapter against the Muslims in his *On Divine Providence*. In the case of George, however, this topic is particularly contentious and arguably lies at the heart of all other theological disagreements between Christians and Muslims. It is the Muslim accusation that the true Gospel of Christ has been falsified, a teaching that is commonly referred to by the Arabic term *taḥrīf* ("falsification").

In one way or another, almost all Christian apologists responding to Islam in Syriac or Arabic touched upon Muslim suspicions or allegations of biblical corruption. What makes George's case unique, however, is that he is the earliest known Christian author to formulate a concise yet comprehensive response to it. Moreover, many of his arguments would become staples in the later tradition of Christian apologetics vis-à-vis Islam. The purpose of this contribution is to provide a detailed study of George's response to *taḥrīf*. Since our author is not well-known, I will begin by reviewing the main bio-bibliographical data before introducing his *Commentary*. Then, I turn to chapter 49 of the introduction and discuss its title, topic, audience, purpose, and literary structure. Thereafter, I analyze George's arguments in the light of the later Christian apologetic tradition. Finally, I offer the *editio princeps* of chapter 49 together with an English translation.

2 George of Bʿeltan and his *Commentary*

Born in the village of Bʿeltan, near Ḥims, sometime during the first half of the eighth century, George received his training in Greek and Syriac studies at the monastery of Qenneshre. After the death of Patriarch Athanasios IV Sandloyo in 758, he was elected patriarch at a synod in Mabbug due to his piety and erudition. A mere deacon at the time, his election was opposed by David of Dara and John of Callinicus, who rallied other Mesopotamian bishops in support of consecrating the

and Syriac Apologetics Against Islam: The Case of Job of Edessa's *Book of Treasures*," in *The Book of Nature in the Middle Ages*, ed. A. Vanderjagt and K. van Berkel, Groningen Studies in Cultural Change 16 (Leuven–Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2005), 71–84.

latter as Patriarch. After John's death in 762, he was succeeded by David of Dara. This new anti-patriarch appealed to the Caliph Abū Jaʿfar ʿAbd Allāh al-Manṣūr (r. 754–775; 136–158 AH) to accuse George of tax fraud, exercising his office without the Caliph's permission, and refusing to carry anything bearing the name of the prophet Muḥammad. As a result of these charges, George was brought before the Caliph in Baghdad in 767, where he was imprisoned. Only nine years later, upon the ascension of al-Mahdī (r. 775–785), he regained his freedom. Although his release was staked on the condition that he would not exercise his office or title, he eventually was confirmed as Patriarch by the Muslim authorities in 777. After a short period of illness, he died in 789/90 at the monastery of Mōr Barṣawmō near Melitene and was buried there.[7]

Living during the tumultuous period following the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate, George's ecclesiastical career was quite troubled. During the nine years he spent in prison, he is reported to have composed "beautiful poems (*mimrē*), many hymns (*madrōšē*), and pleasant and accurate teachings (*malfōnwōtō*)."[8] Unfortunately, none of these works are preserved, with the exception of his *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, which dates, most probably, to this period.[9] After his release, he wrote a synodal letter in 785,[10] and a letter to the deacon Guria of Edessa concerning the liturgical formula "We break the heavenly bread," the use of which later sparked some controversy.[11] Finally, there are five monastic canons published

7 Our main Syriac sources are the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, the *Chronicle of 813*, the *Chronicle of 819*, and the *Chronicle* of Dionysius of Tell-Maḥrē (mainly via the *Chronicle* of Michael Rabō). The most detailed biography that pays close attention to inconsistencies in our sources is D. Bundy, "Georges de Beʿeltân," in *DHGE*, vol. 20, 595–99. See also Philip Wood, *The Imam of the Christians: The World of Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, c. 750–850* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021), 283 (index); Witold Witakowski, "Giwargis of Bʿeltan," in *e-GEDSH*, https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Giwargis-of-Beltan [Accessed May 24, 2023]; Anton Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur, mit Ausschluss der christlich-palästinensischen Texte* (Bonn: A. Marcus und E. Webers Verlag 1922), 269–70; and Ignatius Aphrem I Barsaum, *Kitab al-lūʾlūʾ al-manthūr fī taʾrīkh al-ʿulūm waʾl-adab al-Suryāniyya*, 4th edition (Glane–Losser: Passeggiata, 1987), 322–3.

8 J.-B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche (1166–1199)*, 4 vols. (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1899–1904), xi, 26, vol. 2, 529 (trans.), and vol. 4, 478 (text).

9 See Witakowski, "Giwargis of Bʿeltan"; and Baumstark, *Geschichte*, 269–70. Barsaum (*al-Lūʾlūʾ al-manthūr*, 322) suggests that some of his poetry may have been added anonymously to the liturgy.

10 See Arthur Vööbus, *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition*, vol. 2, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 376 (Leuven: Peeters, 1976), 2–7 (text), 2–7 (trans.); Arthur Vööbus, *Syrische Kanonessammlungen: Ein Beitrag zur Quellenkunde*, vol. 1: *Westsyrische Originalurkunden I, A*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 307 (Leuven: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1970), 3–13.

11 This letter is quoted by Michael, see Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, vol. 3, 5–8. See also Wood, *The Imam of the Christians*, 112–13.

under the name of George, bishop of the Arab tribes, which, most probably, belong to our George.[12]

George's *Commentary* has received scarce attention by scholars so far. However, its significance to the history of Syriac exegesis of the New Testament should not be underestimated. On the one hand, Anton Baumstark shows that the *Commentary* compiles earlier traditions from Greek and Syriac authorities like Eusebius, John Chrysostom, the Cappadocian fathers, Philoxenos of Mabbug, Jacob of Edessa, and George, bishop of the Arabs.[13] On the other hand, Lorenz Schlimme points out that it was an important source for Moses bar Kephā (d. 903), whose exegetical work in turn was a major source for Dionysius bar Ṣalībī (d. 1171).[14]

George's *Commentary* is only preserved today in Vatican, MS Syriac 154. This manuscript is written in the *Esṭrangēlā* script and consists of two parts: fols. 1–50, 57–77, 102–3 and 106 are written on parchment and date to between the eighth and tenth centuries; the rest of the manuscript is written on paper by a single hand from the thirteenth century. The manuscript suffered considerable damage, including several folios which are either lost or were displaced during rebinding. The latter observation is evident from the fact that fol. 1r has chapter 46 of the introduction, while a number of preceding chapters (nos. 20–22, 23–39, 40–43) are found towards the end of the manuscript.[15]

The only substantial study of this manuscript so far is Baumstark's description in a 1902 survey of West Syriac Gospel exegesis.[16] As Baumstark observes, George's introduction consists of four discourses or *mimrē*, each divided into brief chapters

12 Ignatius Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia syriaca*, 2nd edition (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1965), 187. These canons are published in Arthur Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism* (Stockholm: Etse, 1960), 99.

13 Anton Baumstark, "Die Evangelienexegese der syrischen Monophysiten," *OC* 2 (1902): 151–69, 358–89, here 364–369; and Anton Baumstark, "Syrische Fragmente von Eusebios περὶ διαφωνίας εὐαγγελίων," *OC* 1 (1901): 378–82, here 381.

14 Lorenz Schlimme, "Die Bibelkommentar des Moses Bar Kepha," in *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus, Studies in Early Christian Literature and Its Environment, Primarily in the Syrian East*, ed. R. H. Fischer (Chicago, IL: Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1977), 63–72, here 62. Unfortunately, Bar Kephā's Gospel commentaries are only partially preserved, see, most recently, Abdul-Massih Saadi, *Moshe Bar Kepha's Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 59 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press 2020). Bar Ṣalībī's *Commentary on the Gospels* has been published in several installments and was recently re-edited by Nahir Akçay, *The Commentary on the Gospels by Dionysius Jacob Bar Salibi, Metropolitan of Amid (†1171)* (Damascus: Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, 2018).

15 Baumstark, "Evangelienexegese," 360–1. Digital images of the MS are available online in the Digital Vatican Library: https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.sir.154.pt.1, and https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.sir.154.pt.2 [Accessed May 24, 2023].

16 Baumstark, "Evangelienexegese," 360–9.

of half a column to two-three columns in length. The chapters are mostly structured in the form of question and answer.[17] *Mimrē* II–IV pertain to issues which are more specific to the interpretation of the Gospel of Matthew: *Mimrō II* (22 chapters) discusses various questions relating to the genealogy of Jesus.[18] *Mimrō* III (7 chapters) covers alleged contradictions between Matthew and Luke relating to the nativity of Jesus.[19] Finally, *Mimrō* IV (7 chapters) discusses the translation and meaning of the name "Christ," the person of Matthew, the meaning of "Kingdom of God" versus "Kingdom of Heaven," the baptism of Mary, and the approximative dates of the annunciation and the birth of Jesus.[20]

Mimrō I, on the other hand, is considerably longer with 51 chapters and has a broader scope. Sadly, the first 21 chapters are either lost or illegible. As for the extant chapters, these discuss such topics as the Eucharist, the value of faith versus works, the reasons for the Incarnation, the sources of the Evangelists, the virginity of Mary, the reason why the Old and New Testaments were given in the form in which they were given, why there are four Gospels, the chronology of the Gospel, the character of the Evangelists, the distribution of Jesus' humble words across the four Gospels and its reasons, and the writing purpose of Matthew.[21] It is also toward the end of *Mimrō* I that we find two chapters that are specifically written in response to particular religious opponents: chapter 50 responds to the Jewish claim that the Gospel is an unlawful addition to the Law of Moses which contradicts the latter.[22] Chapter 49, entitled "Against the pagans concerning the truth of the Gospel" (*Luqbal ḥanpē ʿal šrōreh d-Ewangelion*), responds to the accusation that the Gospel has been altered.[23] The latter chapter, as we shall see, is George's response to the Muslim charge of *taḥrīf*.

Before turning to this chapter, a final comment is warranted on the issue of authorship. In our principal survey of the extant Syriac commentaries on the New Testament, John McCullough does not discuss George's *Commentary*, but only lists

17 For an overview of this genre, see Bas ter Haar Romeny, "Question-and-Answer Collections in Syriac Literature," in *Erotapokriseis: Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context,* ed. Annelie Volgers and Claudio Zamagni, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 37 (Leuven–Paris–Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2004), 145–63.

18 Vatican, MS Syriac 154, fols. 3ra–8vb. Several of these chapters preserve Eusebian materials which have been edited and translated in Gerhard Beyer, "Die Evangelischen Fragen und Lösungen des Eusebius in Jakobitischer Überlieferung und deren nestorianische Parallelen," *OC* 24 (1927): 80–97.

19 Vatican, MS Syriac 154, fols. 8vb–11vb.

20 Vatican, MS Syriac 154, fols. 11vb–15rb.

21 Baumstark ("Evangelienexegese," 361–64) translates the titles of the extant chapters.

22 Vatican, MS Syriac 154, fols. 1.b.va–2ra.

23 Vatican, MS Syriac 154, fols. 1.b.ra–1.b.va.

his name among the authors whose exegetical works have been presumably lost.[24] McCullough bases this judgement on the doubts which Baumstark supposedly expressed about George's authorship of the commentary preserved in Vatican MS Syriac 154. However, this appears to be a misreading of Baumstark's *Geschichte*. In reality, neither Baumstark, nor any other scholar that I know of, has called into question George's authorship. Baumstark does refer to a potential, second textual witness from the seventeenth century preserved in Urmia, only to go on and dismiss this possibility on the grounds that this lengthy commentary on Matthew is "too Nestorian" to have been written by a West Syriac Patriarch. Presumably, it is this note that lies at the basis of McCullough's confusion.[25]

Although McCullough's doubts seem ungrounded, his statement does raise the question of how George of Bʿeltan's name became associated with the Vatican manuscript in the first place. Unfortunately, the Assemanis are not very explicit about their reasons for this attribution in their *Catalogue*.[26] It is likely that closer attention to the manuscript as a whole might offer clues, but such a study is beyond the scope of the present contribution. Suffice to say here that there is nothing in the manuscript that excludes a dating to the second half of the eighth century. As mentioned above, the *Commentary* quotes Syriac authors like Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) and George, bishop of the Arab tribes (d. 724), but no later ones. It would also make much sense for our Patriarch to rely on these two authors, since they were two major precursors, who, like him, were associated with the monastery of Qenneshre. Moreover, the fact that this *Commentary* was re-used by Bar Kephā points to its authority in the ninth century West Syriac community. Finally, as we shall see, the *Commentary*'s terminology for Muslims and Arabs is entirely consistent with that of other Syriac texts from the seventh and eighth centuries. Therefore, I will assume that George's authorship is securely established, until new evidence suggests otherwise.

24 John C. McCullough, "Early Syriac Commentaries on the New Testament," *Theological Review* 5, no. 1 (1982): 14–33 and 5, no. 2 (1982): 79–126, here 98.

25 Baumstark, *Geschichte*, 270, n. 1.

26 J. S. Assemani and S. E. Assemani, *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae codicum manuscriptorum catalogus in tres partes*, vol. 3 (Rome: Maisonneuve, 1759), 293.

3 Chapter 49 of the Introduction

3.1 Title and Appellation for Muslims

Unlike the subsequent chapter against the Jews, it may not seem readily obvious from its title that chapter 49 engages Islam: "Against the pagans (*ḥanpē)* concerning the veracity of the Gospel." Indeed, George does not use one of the more typical early Syriac nomenclatures for what we now call Muslims, like *Ṭayyāyē* ("Arabs") or *Mhaggr(āy)ē* ("Hagarenes"), but rather uses *ḥanpē*.[27] The latter term is usually translated as "pagans." However, as Michael Penn observes, *ḥanpē* often had a broader meaning for Syriac authors of the early Islamic period: it could mean both literal polytheists, as well as monotheists who were considered "as errant as polytheists."[28] It was according to this broader sense that the term appears to have been applied to Muslims by Syriac apologists like Theodore bar Kōnī (ca. 792/3) and Nonnus of Nisibis (d. c. 870),[29] as well as in the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn* (ca. 775/6).[30] David Friedenreich further notes that Muslims often were treated as equivalent to pagans for legal purposes: this way, the same restrictions could be applied to interactions with them that already existed in pre-Islamic times to regulate relations between Christians and pagans (and Jews).[31] It is in this connection that we find apparent references to Muslims in the canons of Gīwargīs I

27 For the various names for Muslims used in Syriac apologetic texts from the early Islamic period, see Sidney H. Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad: His Scripture and His Message According to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the First Abbasid Century," in *La vie du prophète Mahomet: Colloque de Strasbourg, Octobre 1980*, ed. Toufic Fahd (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980), 99–146, here 118–25.

28 Penn, *Envisioning Islam*, 67.

29 Sidney H. Griffith, "Chapter Ten of the Scholion: Theodore Bar Kônî's Apology for Christianity," *OCP* 47, no. 1 (1981): 158–88, esp. 176. Nonnus of Nisibis contrasts the "pagans of old" to the "pagans of now" or the "new pagans," see Sidney H. Griffith, "The Apologetic Treatise of Nonnus of Nisibis," *ARAM* 3 (1991), 115–38, esp. 127–8.

30 Penn, *Envisioning Islam*, 76. See, for instance, the passage on Christian apostacy in Amir Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnīn, Parts III and IV A.D. 488–775* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999), 321–30, where he notes (323, n. 1) that "paganism in the context of this discourse is synonymous with Islam."

31 David M. Freidenreich, "Muslims in Canon Law, 650–1000," in *CMR*, vol. 1, 83–98, here 91.

(d. 676),[32] Athanasius II of Balad (d. 687),[33] and Jacob of Edessa (d. 708).[34] Another motive for referring to Muslims as *ḥanpē* has to do with its similarity to the Arabic *ḥunafāʾ* (sg. *ḥanīf*), which is considered to have the polar opposite meaning of "pagan," namely "monotheist."[35] As Griffith points out, this word-play allowed Syriac writers to exploit "the nuisance potential inherent in the mutually exclusive senses of the two nouns."[36] Although this appellation was gradually eclipsed by others, most notably *Ṭayyāyē*, it was still applied to Muslims by an author as late as Jacob bar Shakkō (d. 1241).[37]

From the discussion that follows in George's chapter, there can be little doubt that his "pagan" opponents were indeed Muslims.[38] This becomes especially clear when he refers to the period before "the coming of their prophet (*nbiyō*)," and then goes on to quote that which this prophet claimed "was spoken to him" (§3). This conclusion is by no means diminished by the fact that George never mentions Muḥammad, the Qur'ān, or Islam by name. As scholars have noticed, early Christian apologists writing on Islam in Syriac and Arabic rarely did this.[39]

It should be noted that George uses the word *Ṭayyāyē* elsewhere in chapter 49, but not to refer to what we now call "Muslims." This occurs when he argues that, since the rise of Islam, no synod has taken place in which the nations (*ʿammē*), i.e., "Greeks, *Ṭayyōyē*, Persians, barbarians, and Syrians," gathered during which they decided to alter the Gospel, because it is "the same to all of them" (§3). Here,

---

32 Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*, 69–76, esp. 70.

33 Rifaad Y. Ebied, "The Syriac Encyclical Letter of Athanasius II, Patriarch of Antioch, which Forbids the Partaking of the Sacrifices of the Muslims," in *Orientalia Christiana: Festschrift für Hubert Kaufhold zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Peter Bruns and Heinz Otto Luthe, Eichstätter Beiträge zum Christlichen Orient 3 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 169–74, esp. 170.

34 Penn, *Envisioning Islam*, 67–68.

35 Elsaid M. Badawi and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage*, vol. 1, Handbook of Oriental Studies – Section 1: The Near and Middle East 85 (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2008), 239. According to Q 6:161, Abraham was a *ḥanīf*.

36 Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 120. Likewise, see Milka Levy-Rubin, "Praise or Defamation? On the Polemic Usage of the Term *Ḥanīf* Among Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 28 (2003): 202–25.

37 Teule, "Jacob bar Shakkō," 242.

38 Further evidence for George's characterization of Muslims as pagans comes from his canons. Three of them (nos. 11–13) deal with interactions with Muslims, who are called *ḥanpē* and/or *Mhaggrē* ('Hagarenes'), see Vööbus, *Synodicon*, 4 (text), 5 (trans.).

39 Griffith ("Chapter Ten of the Scholion," 176–7) suggests that such oblique references to Islam were a protective measure, aimed at reducing the risk of being charged of speaking "unfittingly" about "the prophet, God's Book, or his religion," and thus being debarred from the protection (*dhimma*) of the Muslims. See also Sandra T. Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth" in the Early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rāʾiṭah* (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2006), 64.

the term has an ethnic appeal which is close to our word "Arabs," including both Muslims and non-Muslims. It is the context that suggests that all participants to this non-existent synod would have to be Christians.

George's usage of the term *Ṭayyāyē* matches that of other early Syriac writers on Islam. Originally an ethnonym for a particular Arab Christian tribe called the *Banū Ṭayy*, by the sixth century the term was used more broadly to refer to Arabic-speakers living a nomadic or non-nomadic lifestyle, regardless of their religious affiliation. Following this pre-Islamic usage, the word was most frequently used by Syriac writers of the seventh century to refer to the new conquerors and rulers from the Ḥijāz.[40] But it still did not denote a specific religious affiliation. As Penn notes, only in some ninth-century texts does the term *Ṭayyāyē* take on greater religious valence, to the point that a phrase like "Hagarene *Ṭayyāyē*" would seem like a tautology; for now, "all *Tayyāyē* were Muslims by definition."[41] Indeed, by the time of Bar Ṣalībī, Syriac writers generally use the word *Ṭayyāyē* to speak of Muslims.[42]

3.2 The Charge of *Taḥrīf*

The authority of the Bible quickly became a major point of contention between Christians and Muslims. We already find evidence for this in the Qur'ān. On the one hand, the Qur'ān recognizes the Torah and the Gospel as true revelations which were sent down via true messengers to Jews and Christians from the same, heavenly "Mother of the Book" (*umm al-kitāb*) as the revelation to Muḥammad was (e.g., Q 3:3, 3:7, 19:30, 23:49). On the other hand, several verses assert that Jews and Christians, called the "People of the Book" (*ahl al-kitāb*), did not remain faithful to their Scriptures. The term *taḥrīf* traces its origin back to an accusation that is leveled four times against certain Jews (Q 2:75, 4:46, 5:13, 5:41), who are said to have tampered with or altered (*yuḥarrifūna*) words (*kalim/kalām*) from their places (*mawāḍi'*). Other verses allude to substituting words or letters for

40 For an excellent survey of the use of the term *Ṭayyāyē* before and after the period of Muslim rule, see Jack Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East: Religion, Society, and Simple Believers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 525–31 (Appendix II).

41 Penn, *Envisioning Islam*, 59.

42 In this respect, it is interesting to note that whereas Bar Kephā maintains the title words "Against the pagans" when re-using George's chapter (BL MS Add 17274, fol. 33vb), Bar Ṣalībī turns this into "Against the *Ṭayyōyē*" in the introduction to his *Commentary on the Gospels* (ed. Akçay, 32–3), see Jacobs, "Appraising Bar Ṣalībī's Knowledge of Islam," forthcoming.

others, twisting or confounding words, or forgetting or concealing some. The Qur'ān does not provide a full picture of what exactly was falsified, how this was done, when, by whom, and for what reason. It was up to later commentators to fill in these blanks.[43]

Scholars have often dichotomized Muslims views of the Bible into two categories of *taḥrīf*: textual falsification (*taḥrīf al-naṣṣ*) and misinterpretation (*taḥrīf al-maʿnā*). Accordingly, it is argued that the strand of textual corruption is late, flourishing in the wake of polemicists like Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064; 456 AH), whereas the "weaker" strand of scriptural misinterpretation was the dominant early view.[44] However, this characterization of early Muslim views of the Bible is untenable. As Ryan Schaffner demonstrates, allegations of textual corruption are well-attested in the earliest Muslim refutation texts of Christianity from the eighth and ninth centuries. In addition, Schaffner shows that textual corruption is the primary key through which Christians perceived early Muslim views of the Bible, as seen from early Christian apologies in response to Islam.[45] Although not discussed by Schaffner, it should be pointed out that a potential allusion to textual falsification is already found in the earliest Syriac apology, the *Dialogue of Patriarch John and the Emir*. The first question which the Emir puts to the Patriarch is whether the Gospel of the Christians is "one and the same and does not vary in anything," which seems to signal the Emir's doubts regarding its authenticity.[46]

It is possible that some of George's exegetical reflections elsewhere in his *Commentary* were influenced by Muslim readings which imply that Christians have misread the Gospel, however difficult it may be to pinpoint or prove this. As Martin Accad has demonstrated by analyzing the way in which later Syriac exegetes like Moses bar Kephā and Bar Ṣalībī reworked their sources, this is at least the case for them.[47] Yet, there can be no doubt that George's chapter 49 is specifically tailored to counter charges of textual corruption. This actually makes George's commentary

43 A comprehensive study of the Qur'ān's references to the earlier Scriptures and the treatment of the theme of *taḥrīf* by early *mufassirūn* is provided in Gordon Nickel, *Narratives of Tampering in the Earliest Commentaries on the Qur'ān*, The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 13 (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2011), especially chapters 3 and 5.

44 See, especially, J.-M. Gaudeul and R. Caspar, "Textes de la tradition musulmane concernant (falsification) des écritures," *Islamochristiana* 6 (1980): 61–104.

45 See Ryan Schaffner, "The Bible through a Qur'ānic Filter: Scripture Falsification (*Taḥrīf*) in 8th- and 9th-Century Muslim Disputational Literature" (PhD Thesis, The Ohio State University, 2016).

46 Michael P. Penn, "*John and the Emir*: A New Introduction, Edition, and Translation," *Le Muséon* 121, no. 1–2 (2008): 65–91, here 82 (text), 86 (trans).

47 Martin Accad, "Did the Later Syriac Fathers Take into Consideration Their Islamic Context When Reinterpreting the New Testament?," *PO* 23 (1998): 13–32.

one of our earliest pieces of evidence for the fact that Christians already during the first decades of Abbasid rule were pressed with such charges.

In George's formulation of the Muslim accusation, he speaks of "many things" (*sagiyōtō*) which allegedly have been changed in the Gospel. This resembles other early Christian apologies in which the allegation of *taḥrīf* is voiced in general terms, without specifying particular *loci* of corruption.[48] Other apologists, however, typically responded to allegations of having suppressed the name of Muḥammad from the Scriptures or having put Trinitarian words in Jesus' mouth.[49] This should not necessarily be taken to mean that George was unaware of such charges. As he later points out, falsification basically applies to three categories of passages: laws and commandments, the creed, or practices (§2). Any particular Muslim charge of textual corruption would fit within these three broad categories.

3.3 Audience, Purpose, and Literary Structure

Since George wrote his *Commentary* in Syriac, a language that hardly any Muslim would be able to read, he clearly wrote for Christian eyes only, and more particularly for learned monks, deacons, priests, and bishops. His purpose in including a chapter against Islam seems straightforward: he wants to equip his Christian readers with a ready-made response to an accusation which he deemed severe and frequent enough for it to require a response.

George's overall refutation strategy is two-fold. Having received a thorough training in Greek learning at the monastery of Qenneshre, George's first strategy consists of adopting a rhetorical device which is common since antiquity for analyzing or solving problems: he instructs his readers to question the Muslim charge by asking "When?," "Who?," "Why?," and "What?" (§1).[50] Having set the stage by raising these counter-questions, he then explores each of them by arguing that out of one or two possible answers, none is valid: Which passages were altered and

48 See, e.g., Schaffner, "The Bible Through a Qur'ānic Filter," 335 (*Disputation of Bēt Ḥālē)*, 339 (Abū Rāʾiṭa), 344 (al-Kindī), 347–49 (Abraham of Tiberias).

49 See Schaffner, "The Bible Through a Qur'ānic Filter," 332 (Timothy I), 338 (Abū Qurra), 352–3 (*Letter of Leo III to ʿUmar II*).

50 The other three of the so-called "seven circumstances" (i.e., "Where?," "With what?," and "How?") are not addressed, although George does note in passing that the alleged falsification could not have taken place at a synod (§3). On the origins of this rhetorical device, see Michael C. Sloan, "Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as the Original Locus for the *Septem Circumstantiae*," *Classical Philology* 105 (2010): 236–51.

were they altered for material or spiritual gain (§2)? Did the falsification happen before or after the Muslims came to power (§3)? Were the apostles the ones who falsified the Gospel? (§4) Apparently, George was counting on the fact that Muslims would be unable to adequately answer these counter-questions. Such Christian rebuttals were likely one of the reasons why Muslim exegetes soon developed more detailed narratives of *taḥrīf*. Eventually, this would culminate in the systematized accounts by Muslim authors such as the Andalusian scholar Ibn Ḥazm.[51]

In addition to his primary appeal to a standard rhetorical device, George at the end of his chapter provides his readers with "another way" to respond to *taḥrīf* (§5). For this second strategy, he briefly lists five proofs through which the truth of the Gospel can be known. Interestingly, these proofs include both positive and negative criteria to identify the true scripture and religion. As we shall see below, George is pioneering here what has been called a "True Religion Apology."

4 George and the Burgeoning Apologetic Tradition

George's chapter counts as one of our earliest extant Syriac apologetic texts in response to Islam. Since he died in 789/90, the *Commentary* certainly predates Bar Kōnī's *Scholion*, which was composed around 792/3. If the *Commentary* indeed was written during (or before) his incarceration between 767 and 775, as assumed by Witakowski and Baumstark, then it would also predate Timothy I's *Disputation with the Caliph al-Mahdī* (ca. 782/3), since it was al-Mahdī who released George from prison upon his ascension to the throne. If so, it follows that George's apology is only predated by the *Dialogue of Patriarch John and the Emir* (probably late seventh century) and, possibly, depending on its dating, the *Disputation of Bēt Ḥālē*.[52]

Given its early date, it is striking to observe to what extent George's arguments would become standard in later Christian apologetic texts. This is not to say that our Patriarch should be regarded as a pivotal figure, who decisively impacted the

51 See Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible from Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm*, Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science: Texts and Studies 22 (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 1996).
52 Long dated to the 720s, a late eighth or early ninth century date has recently been proposed by David G. K. Taylor, "The Disputation between a Muslim and a Monk of Bēt Ḥālē: Syriac Text and Annotated English Translation," in *Christsein in der islamischen Welt: Festschrift für Martin Tamcke zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Sidney H. Griffith and Sven Grebenstein (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2015), 187–42, here 188–200.

burgeoning tradition of Christian apologetics in response to Islam. Rather, this observation more likely attests to the fact that this kind of apologetic thought was already well underway during George's tenure as Patriarch.

In this section, I examine his three main argumentation strategies in the light of the later apologetic tradition: 1) the use of arguments based on psychology and history; 2) the appeal to testimonies from the Qur'ān; and 3) his use of the so-called "True Religion Apology." I will pay attention especially to the latter two strategies, since George's use thereof urges us to rethink their place in the Syriac apologetic tradition at large. I will illustrate the pervasiveness of George's arguments mainly by drawing on other Christian apologies composed in Syriac and Arabic during the early Abbasid period. However, in order to draw attention to the *long durée* of the ideas expressed by George, I will occasionally also refer to later texts.

4.1 Psychological and Historical Arguments

Faced with the charge of biblical falsification, a standard reflex of early Christian apologists was to appeal to "common-sense" arguments based on psychology and history. Timothy I's response, for instance, was entirely based on such arguments. In response to al-Mahdī's accusation that Christians have suppressed testimonies about Muḥammad in the Gospels, Timothy requests the Caliph to support this claim by bringing forth the unfalsified Scriptures. Timothy also points to the psychological impossibility for Christians to change their own Scriptures. What is there to gain by committing this act, Timothy asks, when the Scriptures are "witnesses to our truth."[53] Moreover, the Gospels' account of Jesus matches what was announced about him in the Torah and Prophets.[54] Furthermore, he argues that the enmity between Jews and Christians rules out the possibility that they could have agreed to collude on altering the Scriptures they hold in common.[55] Finally, Timothy argues that if Christians were to have altered the Gospel, they would rather have omitted humiliating things and difficult verses, like Jesus' fatigue, fear of death, the beatings he endured, and his crucifixion, but these are all still there.[56]

53 Martin Heimgartner, *Timotheos I., Ostsyrischer Patriarch: Disputation mit dem Kalifen Al-Mahdī,* Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 631–2: Scriptores Syri 244–5 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), §8:1–8, and 13:36–37.

54 Heimgartner, *Timotheos I. Disputation*, esp. §13:26–36.

55 Heimgartner, *Timotheos I. Disputation*, §13:39–55.

56 Heimgartner, *Timotheos I. Disputation*, §13:56–60.

George provides very similar arguments. Like Timothy, he points to the psychological impossibility for Christians to alter the Gospel, by stressing that they have nothing to gain from such an act. He rules out that material gain could have been a motive for corrupting the Gospel, because we still find today in the Gospel that the first Christians "were living in voluntary poverty (*ba-msarqutō*) and commanded many to live this way (§2)." As for spiritual gain, he adds, this cannot be attained by consciously spreading false ideas about God. As we shall see, George is bringing up material gain here because he will later implicitly criticize Islam for having spread by offering such incentives to its followers. Many other Christian apologists raised the issue of the missing spiritual benefit to scriptural corruption. This argument was still convincing to Bar Ṣalībī in the twelfth century. Re-using Timothy's argument, Bar Ṣalībī affirms that Christians are unable to falsify their Scriptures, since they are "the witnesses to our truth."[57]

As mentioned, Timothy points to the discord between Jews and Christians to exclude any possibility of joint collusion to falsify their common Scriptures.[58] George uses a variation of this argument and points to the historical spread of Christianity among different peoples in different languages to rule out the possibility of reaching an agreeing on a falsified Gospel. George says that there is no proof whatsoever of a synod that gathered representatives of all the nations, "Greeks, Arabs, Persians, barbarians, and Syrians," where they determined to change the Gospel, because it is the same to all of them (§3). This echoes Patriarch John's response to the Emir's question of whether all Christians share the same Gospel: "It is one and the same to the Greeks, the Romans, the Syrians, the Egyptians, the Ethiopians, the Indians, the Arameans, the Persians, and the rest of all the peoples and languages."[59] A similar argument was developed by the ninth century apologist ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, who appears to have been the first Arabic writer to do so.[60] A testimony

57 Joseph P. Amar, *Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī: A Response to the Arabs*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 614–5: Scriptores Syri 239–40 (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), xxiii, 98–99 (text); 91–92 (trans.). On Bar Ṣalībī's re-use of Timothy's *Disputation*, see Heimgartner, *Timotheos I. Disputation*, vol. 2 (trans.), xxxvii, n. 105.

58 Two other early Christian apologists to use this argument are al-Kindī (trans. in N. A. Newman, *Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries (632–900 A.D): Translations with Commentary* [Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993], 355–545, here 498), and Abū Rāʾiṭa, see Sandra T. Keating, "Refuting the Charge of *Taḥrīf*: Abu Rāʾiṭa (d. ca. 835) and his '*First* Risāla *on the Holy Trinity*'" in *Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam*, ed. Sebastian Günther, Islamic History and Civilization 58 (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2005), 41–58, esp. 53–54.

59 Penn, "John and the Emir," 86 (slightly modified translation).

60 Beaumont, *The Theology of ʿAmmār al-Basrī*, 73–100.

to its endurance, the global spread of Christianity was used as the main argument against *taḥrīf* in the *Disputation of Jirjī the Monk,* a popular Arabic apology from the early thirteenth century.[61]

Finally, like Timothy, George asks the Muslims to present evidence to support their claim that Christians hold a falsified Gospel. George stresses that it is acknowledged by everyone that the true Gospel is in the hands of the Christians. If not, George asks, "what would be the true one according to him (i.e., Muḥammad), and (what would be) the true books of the prophets according to those (pagans)?" (§4). The demand to bring forth evidence of the unfalsified scripture is raised by many other apologists. For example, in the *Letter of Leo III to ʿUmar II*, Leo asks for the true books of Moses or the prophets, the psalms of David, or the Gospel of Jesus to be shown or cited. Knowing that his opponent will be unable to adduce such scriptures, he urges ʿUmar to admit that "even you have never seen them."[62] Building on George's argument, Moses bar Kephā in his chapter against *taḥrīf* presents an interesting variation on this argument, which appeals to the central principle of the burden of proof in Islamic law. He asserts: "Either you make true witnesses swear that something in it is changed (by us), or (else) we will take the oath that nothing in it is changed (by us)."[63] Then, he goes on to quote the *ḥadīth* which underpins this legal principle: "Proof is incumbent on the claimant, and the oath on the who denies."[64] This argument will later be borrowed by Bar Ṣalībī in his *Commentary on the Gospels*.[65]

61 Ayman S. Ibrahim and Clint Hackenburg, *In Search of the True Religion: Monk Jurjī and Muslim Jurists Debating Faith and Practice*, Texts from Christian Late Antiquity 69 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2022), 25, 86–93 (text and trans.). Two other later Arabic text using this argument are the twelfth century East Syriac *Commentary on the Nicene Creed* (xx, §19–26, ed. Masri, vol. 3, 250), and *Proofs of the Truth of the Gospel* by Ishoʿyahb bar Malkon (d. 1246), see Herman Teule, "Ishoʿyahb bar Malkon," *CMR*, vol. 4, 331–8, here 336.

62 Arthur Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III," *Harvard Theological Review* 37, no. 4 (1944): 269–332, here 309–10. A similar argument is found in other ninth century Arabic texts, such as the *Apology of al-Kindī* (Newman, *Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 498) and the *Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias* (Marcuzzo, *Le dialogue d'Abraham de Tibériade*, §394).

63 London, British Library, MS Add 17274, fol. 33v–b.

64 For the formation and development of this important legal *ḥadīth* ("*al-bayyina ʿalā l-muddaʿī wa-l-yamīn ʿalā man ankara*"), see Hiroyuki Yanagihashi, *Studies in Legal Hadith*, Studies in Islamic Law and Society 47 (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2019), 480–543.

65 The *ḥadīth* quotation is only completely preserved in Bar Ṣalībī's *Commentary* (ed. Akçay, 32).

4.2 Testimonies of the Qur'ān

Given the supreme reverence and authority which Muslims hold for the Qur'ān as God's speech to mankind, it is not surprising that the Arabic scripture sooner or later would come to the attention of the Christians living among them.[66] Although Christians did not consider the Qur'ān canonical scripture, they often quoted or alluded to certain passages as prooftexts for Christian doctrines and practices. Essentially, this is an extension of the very early tradition in Christianity of drawing support from Old Testament *testimonia*.[67] This method of prooftexting the Qur'ān is already attested in the earliest Christian works in Arabic that have reached us: the two untitled apologetic treatises known as *On the Triune Nature of God* and the *Christian Arabic Disputation*, both dated to the second half of the eighth century.[68] Besides quoting testimonies from the Bible, the anonymous Melkite authors of these works also quoted recognizably, though not always accurately, a few passages from the Qur'ān in defense of the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation.[69] The use of prooftexts from the Qur'ān by Arabic Christians already came to maturity in the ninth century *Disputation of Abū Qurra at the Court of al-Maʾmūn*.[70] Eventually, this apologetic use of the Qur'ān would reach its high point in Arabic around the

66 See the standard survey by Sidney H. Griffith, "The Qur'an in Christian Arabic Literature: A Cursory Overview," in *Arab Christians and the Qur'an from the Origins of Islam to the Medieval Period*, ed. Mark Beaumont, The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 35 (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2018), 1–19; and, similarly, Sidney H. Griffith, "Christians and the Arabic Qur'ān: Prooftexting, Polemics, and Intertwined Scriptures," *IHIW* 2 (2014): 243–66. See also Gordon Nickel, "'Our Friendly Strife': Eastern Christianity Engaging the Qur'an," in *CMR*, vol. 15, 255–79; and Clare E. Wilde, *Approaches to the Qur'an in Early Christian Arabic Texts (750–1258 C.E.)* (Bethesda–Dublin–Palo Alto: Academica Press, 2014).

67 See the excellent study on this by Martin C. Albl, *"And Scripture Cannot be Broken": The Form and Function of the Early Christian Testimonia Collections*, Novum Testamentum: Supplements 96 (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 1999).

68 See Mark N. Swanson, "*Fī tathlīth Allāh al-wāḥid*," in *CMR*, vol. 1, 330–33; Mark N. Swanson, "A Christian Arabic Disputation (PSR 438)," in *CMR*, vol. 1, 386–7.

69 See Griffith, "The Qur'an in Christian Arabic Literature," 5–8; and Mark N. Swanson, "Beyond Prooftexting: Approaches to the Qur'ān in Some Early Christian Arabic Apologies," *MW* 88 (1998): 297–18, esp. 303–5. As Swanson demonstrates, the author of *On the Triune Nature* even went "beyond prooftexting," by tacitly interweaving Qur'ānic phrases into his own explanations of the Trinity and the Incarnation, as if Muslim scripture and Melkite theology are in harmony.

70 See Sidney H. Griffith, "The Development of an Apologetic Argument: Abū Qurrah in the Mağlis of al-Maʾmūn," *PO* 24 (1999): 203–33.

end of the Abbasid period in the anonymous *Commentary on the Nicene Creed* (ca. 1170) and Paul of Antioch's *Letter to a Muslim Friend* (ca. 1200).[71]

Since Christian Arabic apologetic literature developed out of the Syriac tradition, the Muslim scripture also made its presence felt in Syriac apologetic texts in response to Islam. A striking difference, however, is that in Syriac rarely any attempt is made to quote the Qur'ān directly. Most typically, one merely recognizes allusions to some of its teachings, like the very popular reference to Jesus's epithet "Word and Spirit of God" (cf. Q 4:171).[72] In fact, the few early Syriac apologists who did attempt to quote the Qur'ān directly, though not always accurately, were Timothy I and the anonymous author of the *Disputation of Bēt Ḥālē*.[73] To find similar quotations after these two East Syriac writers, one has to wait until the period of the Syriac Renaissance. Gregory bar ʿEbrōyō (d. 1286) is one author to do so, especially in his apologetic theology.[74] Another writer is, of course, Dionysius bar Ṣalībī (d. 1171), in whose *Disputation against the Arabs* the use of Qur'ānic

71 See Griffith, "The Qur'an in Christian Arabic Literature." This fascinating but neglected *Commentary,* composed by an anonymous East Syrian in Baghdad around 1170, has recently been fully published by Pierre Masri, *Commentaire du credo de Nicée: Anonyme du 12ème siècle*, 3 vols., Patrimoine Arabe Chrétien 27–29 (Beyrouth: Éditions du CEDRAC, 2011–21). For Paul of Antioch's *Letter*, see the contribution of Thomas Carlson in this volume.

72 For a discussion, see Barbara Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 9 (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2008), 104–21; Jakob, *Syrisches Christentum*, 305–27. For a possible early reference to another passage, see G. Reinink, "An Early Syriac Reference to Qur'ān 112?," in *All Those Nations. . .: Cultural Encounters Within and With the Near East. Studies Presented to Han Drijvers at the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday by Colleagues and Students*, ed. H. L. J. Vanstiphout *et al.*, COMERS/ICOG Communications 2 (Groningen: Styx Publications, 1999), 123–30.

73 See Martin Heimgartner, "The Letters of the East Syrian Patriarch Timothy I: Scriptural Exegesis between Judaism, Christianity and Islam," in *Exegetical Crossroads: Understanding Scripture in Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Pre-Modern Orient*, ed. Georges Tamer *et al.*, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Tension, Transmission, Transformation 8 (Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 47–60, here 54–56; and Taylor, "The Disputation between a Muslim and a Monk of Bēt Ḥālē," esp. §29, 48, and 53. Another eighth century East Syriac text which almost certainly would have contained quotations from the Qur'ān in Syriac is a lost *Refutation of the Qur'ān* by a writer from Timothy's entourage, see M. Swanson, "Abū Nūḥ al-Anbārī," in *CMR*, vol. 1, 397–9.

74 For Bar ʿEbrōyō's quotations, see Joseph Khoury, *Candélabre du sanctuaire de Grégoire Abou'lfaradj dit Barhebraeus. Quatrième base: de l'Incarnation*, Patrologia Orientalis 31/1 (Paris: Firmin–Didot, 1963), 259–62 (index), as well as François Nau, "Deux textes de Bar Hébraeus sur Mahomet et le Qoran," *Journal Asiatique* 210 (1927): 311–29. See also Herman Teule, "The Transmission of Islamic Culture to the World of Syriac Christianity: Barhebraeus' Translation of Avicenna's *Kitāb al-Išārāt wa l-Tanbīhāt*: First Soundings," in *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interactions in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, ed. J. J. Van Ginkel, H. L. Murre-van den Berg, and T. M. Van Lint, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 134 (Leuven–Paris–Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2005), 167–84, here 169.

testimonies reaches its absolute climax in Syriac literature.[75] Moreover, of all the aforementioned Syriac authors, Bar Ṣalībī is the only one who cites the Qur'ān to counter charges of *taḥrīf*.[76]

Given the relatively limited use of the Qur'ān in Syriac texts, it is quite remarkable to encounter such a sustained endorsement of its probative value in a text as early as George's. One of his proofs for the truth of the Gospel are "the testimonies of the Scriptures about it" (§5.5). These Scriptures (*ktōbē*) containing testimonies (*sōhdwōtō*) to the Gospel would not only be the Old Testament according to George, but also the Qur'ān.[77] This is obvious from the preceding discussion in which he quotes two prooftexts from the Qur'ān and alludes to it once more.

In order to demonstrate that the Gospel at the very least cannot have been falsified during the period before the coming of "their prophet," George points out that the latter "has said that it was spoken to him that he should come to *those who hold the Scriptures* (*aylēn d-īt b-īdayhūn ktōbē*) to find the truth" (§3). Here, one clearly recognizes the allusion to the *ahl al-kitāb*, the "People of the Book," as Jews and Christians (and Sabians) are called in the Qur'ān. George's underlying assumption is that Muḥammad would not have been sent to ask guidance from Jews and Christians if their Scriptures were corrupt. This point is further developed by quoting two utterances of Muḥammad in which the People of the Book are highly spoken of as ones who possess authoritative knowledge in matters of scriptural interpretation.

George's second quotation is clearly based on the first half of Q 10:94. The only significant differences from the standard Arabic text of the Qur'ān are the omission of the phrase "about that which We have sent down to you," and the general shift from the singular to the plural form:

George of Bʿeltan, Ch. 49 (§3)

ܘܐܢ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܢܬ ܒܫܟ ܡܢ ܕ[...] ܫܐܠ ܠܐܢܫܐ ܕܩܕܡ ܟ ܗܘ ܐܚܕ ܠܟܬܒܐ

And if you are doubtful [. . .], ask those who have been holding the Scriptures before you.

Q 10:94a

فَإِن كُنتَ فِي شَكٍّ مِّمَّا أَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ فَاسْأَلِ الَّذِينَ يَقْرَءُونَ الْكِتَابَ مِن قَبْلِكَ

So if you are in doubt about that which We have sent down to you, then ask those who have been reading the Scripture before you.

75 See Jacobs, "Syriac Testimonies against the Muslims."

76 See footnote 88.

77 This is also how Bar Ṣalībī (ed. Akçay, 33) understood George's argument, through the intermediary of Bar Kephā. The relevant part of Bar Kephā's own response is lost.

His first quotation, on the other hand, has no straightforward parallel in the Qur'ān: "O, (those) who hold the Scriptures, confirm the things which We have brought to you in words" (§3). Yet, the sentence has a distinct Qur'ānic ring to it. The first phrase echoes the direct address "O, People of the Book" (*yā ahl al-kitāb*), or similar phrases like "O, those who were given the Book" (*yā alladhīna ūtū l-kitāb*), which occur several times in the Qur'ān.[78] The second phrase recalls the Qur'ān's language of confirmation of earlier scriptures.[79] Typically, the Qur'ān the active participle *muṣaddiq*, from *ṣaddaqa*, "to confirm" is used here. Most frequently, the object of confirmation is "what is between their hands" (*mā bayna yadayhi*) or "what is with them" (*mā maʿahum*).[80] In both cases, this refers to the Scriptures that God had previously given to the Jews and the Christians. As for the subject of confirmation in these verses, this generally refers to the Qur'ān itself. For example, Q 3:3 says: "He sent down upon you the Book in truth, confirming what is between their hands. And He has sent down the Torah and the Gospel."[81] Thus, a major discrepancy between George and the Qur'ān is that the latter holds that the new revelation confirms the earlier Scriptures rather than vice versa.

Given George's recognizable but not very accurate quotations, it would be unreasonable to suppose that he had access to the text of the Qur'ān or excerpts thereof in written form. Moreover, while we know that he was at great ease with Greek, he clearly lacked proficiency in Arabic, in contrast to his East Syriac counterpart, Catholicos Timothy I.[82] Therefore, the most likely explanation would be that he was simply quoting from memory as he recalled the probative value of these verses. And he could either have picked up these references from recitation by Muslims or from Christians who reported it to him. This mode of oral transmission was also how other Christian apologists from the early Abbasid period accessed the message of the Qur'ān.[83] In fact, at one point in Timothy's *Disputation*, he even explicitly says: "I *heard* that this is also written in your scripture," to go on to loosely quote from it.[84]

---

78 See Moshe Sharon, "People of the Book", in *EQ*, vol. 4, 36–43.

79 I rely here on Nickel, *Narratives of Tampering*, 47–48.

80 For *mā bayna yadayhi*, see Q 2:97; 3:3, 50; 5:48; 6:92; 35:31; 46:30; and 61:6. For *mā maʿahum*, see Q 2:41, 89, 91, 101; 3:81; and 4:47.

81 My translation.

82 For George's lack of knowledge of Arabic, see Wood, *The Imam of the Christians*, 74–75.

83 For an insightful discussion of the ways in which Christian apologists accessed the text of the Qur'ān other than through a *muṣḥaf* of the Qur'ān, see Roggema, *The Legend*, 134–6.

84 Heimgartner, *Timotheos I. Disputation*, § 19, 31.

George's mode of access to the message of the Qur'ān will remain a matter of conjecture. What is clear, however, is the way in which his appeal to the Qur'ān's praise of the People of the Book and their Scriptures would be shared by many later Christian apologists who sought to uphold the authenticity of the Bible vis-à-vis Muslims. One of George's prooftexts, Q 10:94, would become very common in this respect. A few decades after him, the Arabic writer al-Kindī also quotes it as the first of a series of four testimonies from the Qur'ān, to try to sway his Muslim correspondent to the fact that his own book bears witness to the veracity of the Bible.[85] Likewise, the verse is quoted in the *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā* to prove that the "Holy Gospel is truer than any book, and cannot be impaired by those who want to discredit it, nor can it be referred to in terms of falsification and corruption."[86] A similar argumentation is found in the refutation of Islamic origins by Būluṣ ibn Rajā', and in the twelfth century *Commentary on the Nicene Creed*.[87] As for Syriac texts, Q 10:94 would become a favorite anti-*taḥrīf* prooftext of Bar Ṣalībī. In fact, it is quoted by him no less than five times to this end, in combination with similar verses.[88]

George also pioneered another way to support the integrity of the Bible by means of the Qur'ān. As mentioned above, he provides a third, more allusive reference to one of its teachings. In his analysis of the "who"-question, George rules out that the apostles were the ones who falsified the Gospel on the grounds that the Muslims themselves "testify about them that they were excellent men (*gabrē ṭarqē*) who did not commit this act" (§4). Here, George appears to be referring to the high esteem for the disciples of Jesus in the Qur'ān, to support that they certainly would not falsify the proclamation of their master.

The disciples of Jesus are mentioned four times in the Qur'ān (Q 3:52; 5:111, 112; 61:14). They are called *ḥawāriyyūn* (sg. *ḥawārī*), which is an Ethiopic loanword of *ḥawāryā*, meaning "messengers." What would eventually become the most popular Muslim etymology, however, is the view that *ḥawārī* derives from the Arabic *ḥawar*, meaning "intense whiteness." In this connection, some commentators report that the apostles wore pure white garments, or they hold that the term refers to the

85 Newman, *Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 498–9 (trans.). The three subsequent prooftexts quoted by al-Kindī are Q 5:50, 5:70, and 5:72.

86 Roggema, *The Legend*, §16.19, 468–9 (text and trans.).

87 See David Bertaina, *Būluṣ ibn Rajā': The Fatimid Egyptian Convert Who Shaped Christian Views of Islam*, Arabic Christianity: Texts and Studies 4 (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2022), §18, 114–15 (trans.), and the discussion on p. 52; and Masri, *Commentaire*, chapter 20, §14 (vol. 3, 249), where it is quoted in a long sequence of similar verses against *taḥrīf*.

88 Amar, *Reponse to the Arabs*, 86, 97, 129, 134 (text); 79, 90, 123, 129 (trans.). Q 10:94a is also quoted in his response to *taḥrīf* in his *Commentary* (ed. Akçay, 33). Other verses quoted by Bar Ṣalībī in this connection include Q 3:110, 4:47, 5:46, 5:66, and 61:14.

purity of their hearts. This respectful reading is also connected to the fact that Jesus is said to have called them "my helpers (*anṣārī*) unto God" (Q 3:52; 61:14).[89] Given the term's interpretation, it is not unlikely to suppose that George is referring to the positive view of the apostles of Jesus in the Qur'ān as it was emerging during the early Abbasid period. This way, he was hoping to make a bid for the credibility of their witness to Christ's Gospel.

This argument, too, would be repeated by many later Christian apologists. Several Arabic writers casually refer to the apostles by their Qur'ānic names to co-opt their high status.[90] Many would also quote one or more of the four above-mentioned verses. For example, the *Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias* underscores the fact that the apostles are called "helpers of God" (Q 3:52; 61:14) as proof of the reliability of their witness concerning the crucifixion and the preservation of Christ's Gospel.[91] The same verse is also quoted to underscore the apostles' faithfulness and election in the *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā*, the *Commentary on the Nicene Creed*, as well as by Paul of Antioch.[92] In Syriac, it is even quoted three times by Bar Ṣalībī to argue that the apostles were upright and did not alter the Bible.[93]

4.3 True Religion Apology

The label "True Religion Apology" was coined by Mark Swanson to describe a kind of apologetic discourse that became very popular among Christian Arabic apologists of the ninth century, and which continued to be frequently used in Arabic writings up until at least the fourteenth century. Its purpose was, as Swanson puts it, to discern "on the basis of reason [. . .] that Christianity is the true and

89 See A. H. Mathias Zahniser, "Apostle," in *EQ*, vol. 1, 123.

90 See, e.g., Sidney H. Griffith, "Answers for the Shaykh: A 'Melkite' Arabic Text from Sinai and the Doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation in 'Arab Orthodox' Apologetics," in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark Swanson and David Thomas, The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 5 (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2006), 277–309, here 297; Masri, *Commentaire*, vol. 3, 414 (general index); Ibrahim and Hackenburg, *In Search of the True Religion*, 86–87; 94–95 (text and trans.).

91 Marcuzzo, *Dialogue*, 390–7 (text and trans.).

92 See Roggema, *The Legend*, §16.20, 468–9 (text and trans.); Masri, *Commentaire*, vol. 3, chapter 16, §47, 38 (text); and Paul Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche, évêque melkite de Sidon (XII^{e} s.): Texte établi, traduit et introduit*, Recherches publiées sous la direction de l'Institut des Lettres Orientales de Beyrouth 24 (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1965), 64* (text), 172 (trans.).

93 Amar, *Dionysius bar Ṣalībī*, 97, 129, 135 (text); 89–90, 123, 131 (trans.). This verse is also alluded to in his *Commentary* (ed. Akçay, 32).

God-pleasing *dīn* among the various possibilities on offer."[94] In its bare outline, the argument has two components: Positively, it discusses the valid motives by which people have embraced a given religion as God's true one. Negatively, it lists the worldly, all too human motives by which a religion other than the true one might be accepted. On the positive side, the appeal is made to two standard Christian apologetic arguments based on the miracles performed by Jesus and his followers, and the prophecies fulfilled in Christ. On the negative side, these humanly-understandable motives for the acceptance of a false religion typically include coercion, material gain, tribal or ethnic solidarity, personal approval of teachings, and license with regards to laws, to which individual apologists may add a few more. Although hardly any Christian apologists says this explicitly, Griffith observes that such lists were "devised specifically in the effort to exclude Islam from any claim to be the true religion."[95]

One of the first Christian Arabic apologists to develop this argument was Theodore Abū Qurra (d. ca. 825). In his *Theologus autodidactus*, he lists six unworthy motives for which people have accepted a religion: constraint by the sword; the hope of gain, whether of wealth, power or status; ethnic or tribal solidarity; license to indulge lusts; or the personal approval (*al-istiḥsān*) of familiar or easy doctrines.[96] Around the same time or slightly later, also Abū Rāʾiṭā, ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, and Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq developed similar ideas in Arabic.[97] Ibn Isḥāq (d. 873), for example, lists these six reasons in his response to Ibn al-Munajjim: coercion; deliverance from need or trial; gain in social status or power; a deceptive founder using elegant speech; an ignorant public; and kinship solidarity. In addition, he stresses that, of all the religions in the world, the doctrines of the Christians are "the most difficult, the farthest from convincing (people)."[98] Griffith notes that no Christian

94 Mark N. Swanson, "Christians, Muslims and the True Religion," in *CMR*, vol. 15, 73–97, here 84.
95 Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2008), 98.
96 As summarized in Swanson, "Christians, Muslims, and the True Religion,", 86, based on *Qunūʿ al-ʿaql al-sūqī*, in "On the Confirmation of the Gospel," in Qusṭanṭīn al-Bāshā [Bacha], *Mayāmir Thāwudūrus Abī Qurra usquf Ḥarrān* (Beirut, 1904), 73.
97 See Swanson, "Christians, Muslims, and the True Religion," 84–91. For al-Kindī's version of the argument, see also Mourad Takawi, "ʿAbd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī (d. ca. 830): On the Path of God and Discerning the True Religion," in *Medieval Encounters*, 133–64. Several unworthy reasons are also briefly mentioned in the ninth century *Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias* (Marcuzzo, *Dialogue*, 396–9 [§293], text and trans.), and the tenth century Melkite text known as *Answers for the Shaykh* (Griffith, "Answers for the Shaykh," 297).
98 As summarized in Swanson, "Christians, Muslims and the True Religion," 90, based on Samir K. Samir and P. Nwyia, *Une correspondence islamo-chrétienne entre Ibn al-Munaǧǧim, Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq et Qusṭa ibn Lūqā* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), 698 (§78–80). See also Mark N. Swanson, "A

before these ninth century Arabic writers attempted such an argument, and concludes that it is "an original contribution to apologetics on the part of anti-Muslim apologists of the first Abbasid century."[99] In a later publication, Griffith speculates that Ibn Isḥāq was "[p]erhaps the earliest Christian thinker to devise such a scheme."[100] More recently, Mark Beaumont suggests that it was Abū Qurra "who came up with the idea."[101]

George's chapter reveals that neither Ibn Isḥāq nor Abū Qurra, nor any other Arabic Christian writer of the ninth century could have come up with this idea. This is so because it already features in George's text. This does not necessarily mean that it was our Patriarch who "invented" it. Rather, it would simply seem that reflexions of this kind were already circulating in Syriac Christian milieus during the second half of the eighth century. Historically, it makes sense that Christians around this time were busy discussing the reasons for why a religion other than the true one gained acceptance: It was then that the first waves of Christian conversion to Islam were taking place. In the wake of Caliph ʿUmar II's (d. 720; 101 AH) fiscal reforms promoting tax equality for all Muslims, regardless of their ethnicity, it became very attractive for Christians to throw off the yoke of their *dhimmī* status in exchange for full participation in the life of Muslim society. A case in point is the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, which was written in northern Mesopotamia around 775, during George's tenure as Patriarch. The chronicler expresses his bafflement about how Christians around him at a massive scale had "slipped toward apostacy with great eagerness."[102]

George's version of the apology appears at the end of his chapter, where he lists "another way" to refute the charge of *taḥrīf*. This other way consists of listing five causes (*ʿelōtō*) through which the truth of the Gospel can be known. George develops both positive and negative criteria to discern the truth of the Gospel. Positively, he draws on the classic Christian arguments based on miracles and prophecies. As such, he points to the ability of the Gospel's commandments to heal the infirmities of the soul (§5.2), the Gospel's knowledge of future events (*ʿatīdōtō*) (§5.3), as well

Curious and Delicate Correspondence: The *Burhān* of Ibn al-Munajjim and the *Jawāb* of Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq," *ICMR* 22 (2011): 173–83; and Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella, "'On How to Discern the Truth of Religion,' by Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq: The Impersonal Recension," *Islamochristiana* 44 (2018): 163–71.

99 Sidney H. Griffith, "Comparative Religion in the Apologetics of the First Christian Arabic Theologians," *Proceedings of the PMR Conference* 4 (1979), 63–87, here 75.

100 Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 98, n. 80

101 Mark Beaumont, *The Theology of 'Ammār al-Basrī: Commending Christianity within Islamic Culture*, Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 62 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press 2021), 96.

102 Harrak, *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, 324.

as the testimonies to the Gospel found in other scriptures (§5.5). Negatively, George argues that the Gospel was accepted in the absence of the following five motives: "compulsion of power," "the gift of riches," "elegance of speech," "slyness of modes of ideas," and "the acquisition of conviction of consolation" (§5.4). These motives clearly prefigure the ones that the apologists of the ninth century adduced. While coercion and material gain occur on every list without exception, the use of deception or trickery through elegant speech or cunning ideas is especially emphasized by Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq and ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī. George's fifth motive, the assurance of consolation, is somewhat ambiguous. Probably, this refers to the consolation acquired from the promise of Paradise. In this respect, it may be similar to "the desire for the Hereafter, and the hope of its attainment," listed by Abū Rāʾiṭa.[103] George does not mention collusion or tribal or ethnic solidarity as one of the motives, while all ninth century apologists discuss this.

George provides two more motives, which are formulated positively. By arguing that the first proof of the Gospel's truth is the fact that its teaching "transcends all earthly lusts," (§5.1) he is implicitly saying that the Qur'ān's teaching does the opposite. If so, he could have been thinking of the pursuit of fleshly desires being promoted either in this life by licentious laws like polygamy or divorce, or by the promise of carnal delights in the afterlife. This, at least, are motives which are highlighted by later apologists.[104] In addition, George stresses that the Gospel's teaching "is beyond all minds, to the point that it is even considered folly (*šīṭutō*)" (§5.4). One recognizes here the allusion to Paul's saying that the preaching of a crucified Christ is "a stumbling block for Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23). The turn side to this is, of course, that the Qur'ān's message is presumed to have been accepted because its doctrine of God is simple and easy to grasp. Arabic authors typically use here the term *al-istiḥsān*, personal preference or reasoned approval. As mentioned, Ibn Isḥāq contrasts this to the Christian doctrines that are "the most difficult to understand," which according to him indicates that these teachings were not man-made, but God-given.

Earlier in the chapter, George had already set the stage for his argument by highlighting that none of these unworthy motives apply to the way in which the message of the Gospel was spread by the apostles. Accordingly, he makes the point that attracting followers by appealing to their desire for material gain cannot be suspected of them, because "they were living in poverty and commanded many to live this way" (§2). Moreover, they "were commanded to possess no purse, no bag,

103 Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth"*, 82–83 (text and trans.) (= *Letter on the Proof of the Christian Religion and the Proof of the Holy Trinity*).
104 Swanson, "Christians, Muslims and the True Religion," 84–88.

and no staff" (§4), a reference to Jesus' words when he sent out the twelve Apostles (Mark 6:8). Furthermore, the apostles did not attract followers through the use of force, elegant speech or cunning ideas, because they were "simple people (*hedyuṭē*, from the Greek *idiōtēs*) who did not know to write" (§4).[105]

In addition to tracing the True Religion Apology to Syriac milieus of the later eighth century, George's chapter also urges us to revisit its place in Syriac literature more generally. Despite its ubiquity in later Christian Arabic texts, it is usually considered quite rare in Syriac.[106] Herman Teule points out that one of the few Syriac writers to develop this argument is Jacob bar Shakkō (d. 1241). Teule discovered that Bar Shakkō devoted an entire work to this topic which was called the *Manifest Truth* (*Šrōrō Galyō*). Although this work is not preserved, from a summary by the author himself in his *Book of Treasures*, we learn that his main argument is very similar to that of earlier apologists. While the true religion is strong and can subsist on its own, Bar Shakkō argues, a false religion requires the support of three external pillars to persist: the wealth (*ʿutrō*) of corrupting rulers and judges, the power (*šulṭōnō*) by which rulers can impose falsehood, and the use of cunning and deceitful language (*mhīrut lešōnō*).[107]

Another Syriac writer to systematically develop similar ideas is Gregory bar ʿEbrōyō (d. 1286). In the fourth part of his theological encyclopedia, the *Candelabrum of the Sanctuary*, Bar ʿEbrōyō adduces proof for Christianity on the basis of seven "intelligible miracles" (i.e., miracles that are conceivable by the mind, as opposed to being perceptible by the senses): the strange, good news (*sbartō aksnōytō*) of the Trinity and the Incarnation, which only the perfect can understand, was successfully preached by guileless people (*nōšō tmīmē*) and simple, illiterate workers; the apostles did not make any worldly promises to their followers; they used neither sword nor force against those who disbelieved or resisted; they lived without worldly ambition, material gain, or bodily pleasure; their message was accepted at a time when the world more than ever abounded with prophetic teachings and philosophies; their preaching was not only accepted in uncivilized places like the desert, but also in great and famous cities like Antioch,

105 Note in this respect that George devotes chapter 39 of his introduction to explaining why the Gospel was preached by fishermen and simple people, see Vatican, MS Syriac 154, fols. 218v–219r.

106 A case in point is Teule's observation ("Jacob bar Shakko," 241) that, besides Bar Shakkō, "only Bar Ṣalībī seems to have developed similar ideas [in Syriac literature]."

107 See Teule, "Jacob bar Shakkō," 241; and, more extensively in Herman Teule, "Jacob bar Šakkō, the Book of Treasures and the Syrian Renaissance," in *Eastern Crossroads: Essays on Medieval Christian Legacy*, ed. J.-P. Monferrer-Sala, Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 1 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press 2007), 143–54, here 152–3.

Rome, and Athens; and, finally, their message was accepted not only by ordinary people, but also by men who were versed in the Torah and profane wisdom.[108]

Since these two West Syriac writers flourished in the thirteenth century, the Christian Arabic tradition could, of course, have exerted an influence on them.[109] Nevertheless, the evidence from George's chapter suggests that such ideas may have been more common to Syriac literature than hitherto assumed. Some traces are certainly found in Syriac apologetic texts. Nonnus of Nisibis (d. ca. 870), for instance, emphasizes the point that the twelve apostles were foreign, unlearned men, who had neither arms nor wealth at their disposal.[110] However, it is not solely to this genre that one should turn. Another promising avenue of research is historiography. In this respect, one notices that Syriac chroniclers frequently depict Muḥammad or Muslim rulers after him as having appealed to the very kind of incentives as those discussed above in order to attract new followers or keep older ones in check.[111] A case in point is the account of the rise of Islam in the *Chronicle* of Dionysius of Tell-Maḥrē (d. 845). Dionysius portrays Muḥammad as having established Islamic rule by promising and delivering great riches to those who followed him, subjugating by force all those who resisted, teaching familiar doctrines, indulging human lusts by promising carnal delights in Paradise, and allowing forbidden things like polygamy and divorce.[112] Essentially, this narrativizes all the standard motives by which a false religion has spread that are listed by George and the Christian apologists of the ninth century. Since Dionysius of Tell-Maḥrē was also a monk at the monastery of Qenneshre and inherited the Patriarchal See of Antioch three decades after George's death, it is even possible that he was directly influenced by him. In turn, Dionysius' historical account was

108 Khoury, *Candélabre du sanctuaire*, iii, 1, 2, 56–63 (text and trans.). Bar ʿEbrōyō's intriguing use of the true religion apology thus far appears to have remained unnoticed.

109 Since Bar ʿEbrōyō elsewhere in Base IV of the *Candelabrum* draws from Elias of Nisibis' *Kitāb al-majālis* (Jacobs, "Unveiling Christ," 199–201), this text may have been a source of inspiration for him here as well. For Elias' argument, see Swanson, "Christians, Muslims and the True Religion," 88.

110 Griffith, "Apologetic Treatise," 128.

111 For the earliest Christian sources in Syriac and other languages, see Robert G. Hoyland, "The Earliest Christian Writings on Muḥammad: An Appraisal," in *The Biography of Muḥammad: The Issue of the Sources*, edited by Harald Motzki, Islamic History and Civilization 32 (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2000), 276–97. See, recently, also Charles Tieszen, *Christian Encounter with Muhammad: How Theologians Have Interpreted the Prophet* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

112 For a recent attempt to reconstruct the lost, original text, see Bert Jacobs, "The Rise of Islam according to Dionysius of Tell-Maḥrē: Tentative Reconstruction through Three Dependent Texts," *Le Muséon* 133, no. 1–2 (2020): 207–34, here 222–6. Given the subversive character of Dionysius' narrative, it has fittingly been described as an example of Islamic counter-history. For an excellent discussion of this concept, see Roggema, *The Legend*, 29–35.

seminal for later Syriac conceptions of Islamic origins. This process was further amplified by its re-use in the *Chronicle* of Michael Rabō (d. 1199), the anonymous *Chronicle of the Year 1234*, as well as in Bar Ṣalībī's *Against the Arabs*.[113] A full diachronic study of such motives in Syriac chronicles in comparison to other sources, including Islamic ones, would be a welcome contribution.

5 Text and Translation

Since the text is edited from a *codex unicus*, Vatican, MS Syriac 154, there are no textual variants. The text of chapter 49 is a little over two columns long and runs from fol. 1.b.ra to 1.b.va. Note that the first three folios of the MS are numbered 1, 1.a, and 1.b; from number 2 onwards, the foliation continues in the expected manner. Although the ink of a few words has faded, the *Esṭrangēlā* script remains legible throughout. I have applied as few as possible corrections to the Syriac text or to its punctuation, which have been indicated by brackets. The title of the chapter, the subheading of §5 ("Another way. . ."), and Syriac letters enumerating the five additional proofs are written in red ink in the MS, as has been reproduced in the edition.

The facing English translation follows the principle of "as literal as possible, as free as necessary." Sense words which I have supplied in the translation to aid the reader are placed within parentheses. References to scriptural citations are provided in the footnotes. Folio breaks and their numeration are included in the Syriac text and indicated by a fronted vertical line. Since the text in the manuscript is written in two columns, I have also indicated these column-breaks by -a and -b. In the facing English translation, I have indicated the corresponding places of these folio- and column-breaks with a vertical line. The division in paragraphs and their numeration in brackets is my own.

113 The text re-uses by these three authors are analyzed in Jacobs, "The Rise of Islam," 215–22.

(Chapter) 49. Against the Pagans concerning the Veracity of the Gospel.

[1] They say that many things in the Gospel have been changed by us.[115] But these (charges) should be questioned as follows: When was it changed or being changed? Who are those who changed it? Why did they change it? And which words of it did they change?

[2] Perhaps (they changed the words of) the laws and the commandments, or those of the faith in God, or those concerning actions? But what gain did they desire or devise to increase by (doing) this: material or spiritual? Observe material (gain): We do not see at all that they desired (this), for they were living in (voluntary) poverty and commanded many to live this way. | As for spiritual (gain), how would this be delivered to them when — because they teach about God that which is corrupt, and everyone saw it from these four (Gospels) — they would have nothing to declare in true testimony?

---

114 In the margin.

115 It makes more sense to read *mšahlaf*, "have been changed" (pass. part.), rather than *mšahlef* (act. part.), "he changes," although the number and genre do not match the subject *sagiyōtō*, "many things" (fem. pl.). Presumably, the simplest form of the participle (i.e., masc. sg.) was chosen instead of *mšahlfōn* (fem. pl.) because it appears at the beginning of the phrase. The same phraseology is used by Bar Kephā: ܐܡܪܝܢ ܠܢ ܣܓܝܐ ܕܫܚܠܦ ܠܟ ܡܢ ܐܘܢܓܠܝܘܢ ܗܠܝܢ, "They say to us: 'Many things from the Gospel have been changed by you,'" see Jacobs, "Appraising Bar Ṣalībī's Knowledge of Islam," forthcoming.

116 The ink of the word has faded. It could also be ܚܛܝ , "transgressions [of the law?]," but this seems less likely in this context.

117 Inserted in the margin by a *Serṭō* hand.

118 The words ܐܝ ܕ and ܐܬܝܗܒ are reversed in the manuscript, but this was corrected by using triple dots above each of the two words.

[3] ܫ ܗܠܝܢ ܡܬܝ ܐܡܪ ܐܝܟ ܡܢ ܘܡܐ ܐܝܟ ܘܡܐ ܠܡܢ ܕܐܡܪ ܕܩܕܡ ܡܝܬܝ ܢܒܝܗ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܡܪ ܠܗ ܕܐܬܐ ܠܠܝܢ ܕܒܝܕܗܘܢ ܟܬܒܐ ܕܢܫܟܚ ܫܪܪܐ ܐܡܪ ܠܗ ܕܐܡܪ ܐܢ ܐܝܬ ܒܟ ܫܟ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܡܪ ܐܢ ܐܝܬ ܒܟ ܫܟ ܠܡܢ ܕܒܝܕܗܘܢ ܟܬܒܐ ܫܐܠ ܠܗܘܢ ܠܡܢ ܕܒܝܕܗܘܢ ܟܬܒܐ ܕܐܬܝܗܒ ܠܟ ܐܢ ܐܬ ܐܡܪ ܠܟ ܐܢ ܐܬ ܐܡܪ ܠܟ ܐܢ ܐܬ ܐܡܪ

would be the true one according to him (i.e., their prophet), and (what would be) the true books of the prophets according to those (pagans)?

[5] Another way: The truth of the Gospel is known from these causes.
First, from the soundness of its teaching, which transcends all earthly lusts. Second, from the fact that its commandments heal all sorts of infirmities of the soul. Third, from its knowledge of the things that are to come. Fourth, from the fact that all nations and peoples accepted it without compulsion of power, or the gift of riches, or elegance of speech, or slyness of modes of ideas, or the acquisition of conviction of consolation. (This is) because its teaching is beyond all minds, to the point that it is even considered folly.[124] Fifth, from the testimonies of the Scriptures about it. Therefore, every book in which all these things are collected is the perfect and complete truth. And everything that is lacking from them is either entirely false or imperfect.

123 In the margins.

124 See 1 Cor 1:23. On these unworthy motives for accepting a religion, see 4.3.

Bibliography

Manuscripts

Mardin. Church of the Forty Martyrs. MS 356.
Vatican. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. MS Syriac 154.
London. British Library. MS Add 17274.

Primary Sources

Akçay, Nahir. *The Commentary on the Gospels by Dionysius Jacob Bar Salibi, Metropolitan of Amid (†1171).* Damascus: Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, 2018.

Amar, Joseph P. *Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī: A Response to the Arabs*. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 614–15: Scriptores Syri 239–40. Leuven: Peeters, 2005.

Bertaina, David. *Būluṣ ibn Rajāʾ: The Fatimid Egyptian Convert Who Shaped Christian Views of Islam*. Arabic Christianity: Texts and Studies 4. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2022.

Chabot, J.-B. *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche (1166–1199)*. 4 vols. Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1899–1904.

de Urbina, Ignatius Ortiz. *Patrologia syriaca*. 2nd edition. Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1965.

Ebied, Rifaad Y. "The Syriac Encyclical Letter of Athanasius II, Patriarch of Antioch, which Forbids the Partaking of the Sacrifices of the Muslims." In *Orientalia Christiana: Festschrift für Hubert Kaufhold zum 70. Geburtstag*. Eichstätter Beiträge zum Christlichen Orient 3. Edited by Peter Bruns and Heinz Otto Luthe, 169–74. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013.

Harrak, Amir. *The Chonicle of Zuqnīn, Parts III and IV A.D. 488–775.* Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999.

Heimgartner, Martin. *Timotheos I., Ostsyrischer Patriarch: Disputation mit dem Kalifen Al-Mahdī*. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 631–32: Scriptores Syri 244–45. Leuven: Peeters, 2011.

Ibrahim, Ayman S. and Clint Hackenburg. *In Search of the True Religion: Monk Jurjī and Muslim Jurists Debating Faith and Practice*. Texts from Christian Late Antiquity 69. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2022.

Jeffery, Arthur. "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III." *Harvard Theological Review* 37, no. 4 (1944): 269–332.

Keating, Sandra T. *Defending the "People of Truth" in the Early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rāʾiṭah*. The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 4. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2006.

Khoury, Joseph. *Candélabre du sanctuaire de Grégoire Abou'lfaradj dit Barhebraeus. Quatrième base: de l'Incarnation*. Patrologia Orientalis 31/1. Paris: Firmin–Didot, 1963.

Khoury, Paul. *Paul d'Antioche, évêque melkite de Sidon (XII^e s.): Texte établi, traduit et introduit*. Recherches publiées sous la direction de l'Institut des Lettres Orientales de Beyrouth 24. Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1965.

Marcuzzo, Giacinto Bulus. *Le dialogue d'Abraham de Tibériade avec ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Hāšimī à Jérusalem vers 820*. Textes et études sur l'Orient chrétien 3. Rome: Institut Oriental et Université Pontificale du Latran, 1986.

Masri, Pierre. *Commentaire du credo de Nicée: Anonyme du 12ème siècle*, 3 vols., Patrimoine Arabe Chrétien 27–29. Beyrouth: Éditions du CEDRAC, 2011–21.
Nau, François. "Deux textes de Bar Hébraeus sur Mahomet et le Qoran." *Journal Asiatique* 210 (1927): 311–29.
Newman, N. A. *Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries (632–900 A.D): Translations with Commentary*. Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993.
Penn, Michael P. "*John and the Emir*: A New Introduction, Edition, and Translation." *Le Muséon* 121, no. 1–2 (2008): 65–91.
Roggema, Barbara. *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*. The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 9. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2008.
Saadi, Abdul-Massih. *Moshe Bar Kepha's Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*. Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 59. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press 2020.
Taylor, David G. K. "The Disputation between a Muslim and a Monk of Bēt Ḥālē: Syriac Text and Annotated English Translation." In *Christsein in der islamischen Welt: Festschrift für Martin Tamcke zum 60. Geburtstag*. Edited by Sidney H. Griffith and Sven Grebenstein, 187–242. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2015.
Vööbus, Arthur. *Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism.* Stockholm: Etse, 1960.
Vööbus, Arthur. *Syrische Kanonessammlungen: Ein Beitrag zur Quellenkunde*. Vol. 1: *Westsyrische Originalurkunden I, A*. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 307. Leuven: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1970.
Vööbus, Arthur. *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition*. Vol. 2. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 375–76. Leuven: Peeters, 1976.

Secondary Literature

Accad, Martin. "Did the Later Syriac Fathers take into Consideration their Islamic Context when Reinterpreting the New Testament?." *PO* 23 (1998): 13–32.
Albl, Martin C. *"And Scripture Cannot be Broken": The Form and Function of the Early Christian Testimonia Collections*. Novum Testamentum: Supplements 96. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 1999.
Assemani, J. S. and S. E. Assemani. *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae codicum manuscriptorum catalogus in tres partes*. Vol. 3. Rome: Maisonneuve, 1759.
Badawi, Elsaid M. and Muhammad Abdel Haleem. *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage*. Vol. 1. Handbook of Oriental Studies–Section 1: The Near and Middle East 85. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2008.
Barsaum, Ignatius Aphrem I. *Kitab al-lū'lū' al-manthūr fī ta'rīkh al-'ulūm wa'l-adab al-Suryāniyya*. 4th edition. Glane-Losser: Passeggiata, 1987.
Baumstark, Anton. "Syrische Fragmente von Eusebios περὶ διαφωνίας εὐαγγελίων." *OC* 1 (1901): 378–82.
Baumstark, Anton. "Die Evangelienexegese der syrischen Monophysiten." *OC* 2 (1902): 151–69, 358–89.
Baumstark, Anton. *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur, mit Ausschluss der christlich-palästinensischen Texte*. Bonn: A. Marcus und E. Webers Verlag, 1922.

Beaumont, Mark. *The Theology of 'Ammār al-Basrī: Commending Christianity Within Islamic Culture*. Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 62. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2021.

Beyer, Gerhard. "Die Evangelischen Fragen und Lösungen des Eusebius in Jakobitischer Überlieferung und deren nestorianische Parallelen." *OC* 24 (1927): 80–97.

Bundy, D. "Georges de Beʿeltân." In *DHGE*. Vol. 20, 595–99.

Cucarella, Diego R. Sarrió. "'On How to Discern the Truth of Religion,' by Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq: The Impersonal Recension." *Islamochristiana* 44 (2018): 163–71.

Freidenreich, David M. "Muslims in Canon Law, 650–1000." In *CMR*. Vol. 1, 83–98.

Gaudeul, J.-M. and R. Caspar. "Textes de la tradition musulmane concernant (falsification) des écritures." *Islamochristiana* 6 (1980): 61–104.

Griffith, Sidney H. "Comparative Religion in the Apologetics of the First Christian Arabic Theologians." *Proceedings of the PMR Conference* 4 (1979): 63–87.

Griffith, Sidney H. "The Prophet Muḥammad: His Scripture and His Message According to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the First Abbasid Century." In *La vie du prophète Mahomet: Colloque de Strasbourg, Octobre 1980*. Edited by Toufic Fahd, 99–146. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1980.

Griffith, Sidney H. "Chapter Ten of the Scholion: Theodore Bar Kônî's Apology for Christianity." *OCP* 47, no. 1 (1981): 158–88.

Griffith, Sidney H. "The Apologetic Treatise of Nonnus of Nisibis." *ARAM* 3 (1991): 115–38.

Griffith, Sidney H. "Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts: From Patriarch John (d. 648) to Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286)." In *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*. Edited by Bernard Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner, 251–73. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992.

Griffith, Sidney H. "The Development of an Apologetic Argument: Abū Qurrah in the Mağlis of al-Maʾmūn." *PO* 24 (1999): 203–33.

Griffith, Sidney H. "Answers for the Shaykh: A 'Melkite' Arabic Text from Sinai and the Doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation in 'Arab Orthodox' Apologetics." In *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*. Edited by Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark Swanson, and David Thomas, 277–309. The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 5. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2006.

Griffith, Sidney H. *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2008.

Griffith, Sidney H. "Christians and the Arabic Qur'ān: Prooftexting, Polemics, and Intertwined Scriptures." *IHIW* 2 (2014): 243–66.

Griffith, Sidney H. "The Qur'an in Christian Arabic Literature: A Cursory Overview." In *Arab Christians and the Qur'an from the Origins of Islam to the Medieval Period*. Edited by Mark Beaumont, 1–19. The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 35. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2018.

Heimgartner, Martin. "The Letters of the East Syrian Patriarch Timothy I: Scriptural Exegesis between Judaism, Christianity and Islam." In *Exegetical Crossroads: Understanding Scripture in Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Pre-Modern Orient*. Edited by Georges Tamer et al., 47–60. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Tension, Transmission, Transformation 8. Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter, 2018.

Hoyland, Robert G. "The Earliest Christian Writings on Muḥammad: An Appraisal." In *The Biography of Muḥammad. The Issue of the Sources*. Edited by Harald Motzki, 276–97. Islamic History and Civilization 32. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2000.

Ibrahim, Ayman S., ed. *Medieval Encounters: Arabic-speaking Christians and Islam*. Gorgias Handbooks 55. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2022.

Jacobs, Bert. "Unveiling Christ in the Islamicate World: Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Prophetology as a Model for Christian Apologetics in Gregory Bar ʿEbrōyō's Treatise on the Incarnation." *IHIW* 6, no. 1–2 (2018): 187–216.

Jacobs, Bert. "The Rise of Islam according to Dionysius of Tell-Maḥrē: Tentative Reconstruction through Three Dependent Texts." *Le Muséon* 133, no. 1–2 (2020): 207–34.

Jacobs, Bert. "Syriac Testimonies Against the Muslims: The Qur'anic Quotations in Dionysius bar Ṣalībī's *Disputation against the Arabs*." PhD Thesis. Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2021.

Jacobs, Bert. "Appraising Bar Ṣalībī's Knowledge of Islam: Insights from a Neglected Response to the Charge of Biblical Falsification." In *Dionysius bar Ṣalībī: Guardian of the Syriac Orthodox Tradition.* Edited by Bert Jacobs, Herman Teule, and Joseph Verheyden. Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity. Leiden–Boston: Brill, forthcoming.

Keating, Sandra T. "Refuting the Charge of *Taḥrīf*: Abu Rāʾiṭa (d. ca. 835) and his '*First* Risāla *on the Holy Trinity*'." In *Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam*. Edited by Sebastian Günther, 41–58. Islamic History and Civilization 58. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2005.

Levy-Rubin, Milka. "Praise or Defamation? On the Polemic Usage of the Term *Ḥanīf* Among Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 28 (2003): 202–25.

McCullough, John C. "Early Syriac Commentaries on the New Testament." *Theological Review* 5, no. 1 (1982): 14–33 and no. 2 (1982): 79–126.

Moss, Yonathan. "'A Religion Assembled from Many Religions:' A Syncretizing Characterization of Islam attributed to Cyril of Alexandria." *Henoch* 39 (2017): 287–305.

Nickel, Gordon. "'Our Friendly Strife': Eastern Christianity Engaging the Qur'an." In *CMR*. Vol. 15, 255–79.

Nickel, Gordon. *Narratives of Tampering in the Earliest Commentaries on the Qur'ān*. The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 13. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2011.

Penn, Michael P. *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World.* Pennsylvania, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.

Penn, Michael P. *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015.

Rassi, Salam. *Christian Thought in the Medieval Islamicate World: ʿAbdīshōʿ of Nisibis and the Apologetic Tradition.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022.

Reinink, Gerrit J. "An Early Syriac Reference to Qur'ān 112?." In *All Those Nations. . .: Cultural Encounters Within and With the Near East. Studies Presented to Han Drijvers at the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday by Colleagues and Students*. Edited by H. L. J. Vanstiphout et al., 123–30. COMERS/ICOG Communications 2. Groningen: Styx Publications, 1999.

Reinink, Gerrit J. "The 'Book of Nature' and Syriac Apologetics Against Islam: The Case of Job of Edessa's *Book of Treasures*." In *The Book of Nature in the Middle Ages*. Edited by A. Vanderjagt and K. van Berkel, 71–84. Groningen Studies in Cultural Change 16. Leuven–Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2005.

Roggema, Barbara. "Pour une lecture des dialogues islamo-chrétiens en syriaque à la lumière des controverses internes à l'islam." In *Les controverses religieuses en syriaque*. Edited by Flavia Ruani, 261–93. Études syriaques 13. Paris: Geuthner 2016.

Romeny, Bas ter Haar. "Question-and-Answer Collections in Syriac Literature." In *Erotapokriseis: Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context*. Edited by Annelie Volgers and Claudio Zamagni, 145–63. Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 37. Leuven–Paris–Dudley, MA: Peeters 2004.

Schaffner, Ryan. "The Bible through a Qur'ānic Filter: Scripture Falsification (*Taḥrīf*) in 8th- and 9th-Century Muslim Disputational Literature." PhD Thesis. Ohio State University, 2016.

Schlimme, Lorenz. "Die Bibelkommentar des Moses Bar Kepha." In *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus, Studies in Early Christian Literature and Its Environment, Primarily in the Syrian East*. Edited by R. H. Fischer, 63–72. Chicago, IL: Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1977.

Sharon, Moshe. "People of the Book." In *EQ*. Vol. 4, 36–43.

Sloan, Michael C. "Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as the Original Locus for the *Septem Circumstantiae*." *Classical Philology* 105 (2010): 236–51.

Swanson, Mark N. "Beyond Prooftexting: Approaches to the Qur'ān in Some Early Christian Arabic Apologies." *MW* 88 (1998): 297–318.

Swanson, Mark N. "A Curious and Delicate Correspondence: The *Burhān* of Ibn al-Munajjim and the *Jawāb* of Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq." *ICMR* 22 (2011): 173–83.

Swanson, Mark N. "*Fī tathlīth Allāh al-wāḥid*." In *CMR*. Vol. 1, 330–33.

Swanson, Mark N. "A Christian Arabic Disputation (PSR 438)." In *CMR*. Vol. 1, 386–87.

Swanson, Mark N. "Abū Nūḥ al-Anbārī." In *CMR*. Vol. 1, 397–99.

Takawi, Mourad. "ʿAbd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī (d. ca. 830): On the Path of God and Discerning the True Religion." In *Medieval Encounters*, 133–64.

Tannous, Jack. *The Making of the Medieval Middle East: Religion, Society, and Simple Believers*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018.

Teule, Herman. "Ishoʿyahb bar Malkon." In *CMR*. Vol. 4, 331–38.

Teule, Herman. "The Transmission of Islamic Culture to the World of Syriac Christianity: Barhebraeus' Translation of Avicenna's *Kitāb al-Išārāt wa l-Tanbīhāt*: First Soundings." In *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interactions in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*. Edited by J. J. Van Ginkel, H. L. Murre-van den Berg and T. M. Van Lint, 167–84. Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 134. Leuven–Paris–Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2005.

Teule, Herman. "Jacob bar Šakkō, the Book of Treasures and the Syrian Renaissance." In *Eastern Crossroads: Essays on Medieval Christian Legacy*. Edited by J.-P. Monferrer-Sala, 143–54. Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 1. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007.

Teule, Herman. "The Syriac Renaissance." In *The Syriac Renaissance*. Edited by Herman Teule, Carmen Tauwinkl, Bas ter Haar Romeny and Jan van Ginkel, 1–30. Eastern Christian Studies 9. Leuven–Paris–Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2010.

Teule, Herman. "Jacob bar Shakkō." In *CMR*. Vol. 4, 240–44.

Tieszen, Charles. *Christian Encounter with Muhammad: How Theologians Have Interpreted the Prophet*. London: Bloomsbury, 2020.

Wilde, Clare E. *Approaches to the Qur'an in Early Christian Arabic Texts (750–1258 C.E.).* Bethesda–Dublin–Palo Alto: Academica Press, 2014.

Witakowski, Witold. "Giwargis of Bʿeltan." In *e-GEDSH*, https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Giwargis-of-Beltan.

Wood, Philip. *The Imam of the Christians: The World of Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, c. 750–850.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021.

Yanagihashi, Hiroyuki. *Studies in Legal Hadith*. Studies in Islamic Law and Society 47. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2019.

Zahniser, A. H. Mathias. "Apostle." In *EQ*. Vol. 1, 123.